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The Challenge of Shiga Ken

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How We Got There:

Early in 1907, word came from Japan to Dayton that Monroe Crecelius had fallen at his post in Otsu, while battling nobly with scarlet fever. At that time a young Japanese was convalescing from the same disease in St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Dayton. His great ambition then was to study medicine in America and return to his native land as a healer of disease. Upon his heart the story of Crecelius's death made a deep impression, especially since the challenge was made by the visitor in the adjoining room that perhaps God was calling him to take up the work in Shiga Province which Crecelius had been forced to lay aside after only fifteen months in Japan.

That appeal so casually uttered and then forgotten by the visitor, Mr. Kiyoshi Yabe could not forget. By it he was led to consecrate his life to the ministry and after completing his college course at Otterbein and his theological studies at the University of Chicago, he returned to Japan in the spring of 1915, and soon found himeslf with his newly-wedded wife, living in Zeze, a town of seven thousand.

As Mr. Yabe's co-worker in Shiga Province our Foreign Mission Board had chosen a young theological student of the class of 1914, in Bonebrake Seminary. He became willing to go, but upon being examined by the Board doctor was told that owing to some organic trouble at the time he ought not to go to a foreign climate. Upon hearing the doctor's report I could not get away from the fact that perhaps God wanted Mrs. Knipp and me to return to Japan and take up this long neglected work. Application was made to the Board and we sailed early in 1915, for work in Shiga Province.

A God-Assigned Task.

Our Church had been assigned special responsibility in Shiga Province as a result of a thorough investigation made into religious conditions throughout the Japanese Empire. At that time it was found that, although five-sevenths of her population live in villages and the smaller towns, almost nothing had been done to reach the more than thirty-five millions of mothers, children, men and young people living in those sections. Missionary work was started in Japan in the large port cities. Not until the treaties were revised in 1899, were missionaries allowed to travel without restriction in the interior. As a natural result, the great mass of the people who live in the rural sections have not yet had an adequate chance to hear and know what Christianity really is. *To win Japan for Christ it is absolutely essential that much more be done immediately to reach her thousands of towns and villages and country districts.*

Shiga Province—A Buddhist Center.

Shiga Province is a rural stronghold of Buddhism. Everywhere one goes, he finds many Buddhist temples and in almost every home is seen the household Buddhist shrine where offerings of incense and flowers are constantly made, and where daily prayers are recited. One day when the largest Buddhist temple in Kyoto was holding a popular festival and thousands and thousands of pilgrims were streaming through its gates and worshipping before its image, I asked an at-

tendant where all these people came from and the reply I received was: "The large majority from Shiga Province and other such rural districts."

The way in which Buddhist ideas prevail here is shown by the fact that shortly after the opening of our kindergarten in Zeze, when the children were given time to make with clay anything they wished, one of them started to make "Ishiyama no Kwannon" or the goddess of mercy at a neighboring famous temple, and another "Jidosan," the god who takes special care of children.

Two years ago after three Normal School students had been coming to our English Bible class in the "Life of Christ" for over six months and Mr. Yabe thought they ought to understand pretty well the real meaning of Christianity, he talked to them personally about the claims of Christ upon their lives. One of them said, "Our parents are strong Buddhists and it is impossible for us to think of following a new religion and thus hurt our parents' feelings. It would be unfilial." They all stopped coming to our Sunday School and church, and we thought we had lost our chance with them, but I am happy to say that the two of the three are now again in my Bible class. Our expeience, however, with them illustrates the tremendous hold which Buddhism still has, even upon the young men in rural Japan for all of those three students had come to Zeze from the country.

Our Particular Field.

Shiga Province is an inland province, very conservative and yet very fertile. It raises some of the best rice in all Japan. With a population (714,767) greater than that of South Dakota, its arable area is only 1,400 square miles or less than two per cent. of that of South Dakota.

In this fertile province our particular field is the southern part, including Otsu, the provincial capital, and two neighboring counties, Kurita and Yasu. Of the seven hundred thousand people in the whole province *one hundred thousand of them depend upon our Church for a knowledge of the Gospel!*

Beginning At The Center.

In order to help capture the future teachers of the province we early decided that a strong typical Christian work should be done at Zeze. Here is located the only provincial Normal School for young men. With over three hundred students coming from every county in the province and upon graduation the majority returning to their homes to become teachers in the public schools, the Normal School has twenty-two teachers not a single one of whom is at present a Christian!

Here in Zeze on July 4, 1915, Mr. Yabe held his first public service in a small Japanese dwelling. Two weeks later he started a Sunday school with about tewenty boys and girls present and in the fall Mrs. Knipp began her cooking-class and after the holidays we started an English Bible class. The next spring we opened a kindergarten and on July 4, 1916, a church was organized with fourteen charter members.

Our Aim.

Just now a new and shorter railroad line is being built between Koyo to Otsu. Two tunnels through the mountains, a number of

bridges and culverts, and a high railbed are taking much time, work and money to construct. This new roadbed reminds me often of what we are trying to do in Shiga Province—*build a highway for the trains of the Kingdom of God to run over during the years and centuries to come.*

In Christian America with all your churches, Sunday schools, and Christian ideals it is practically impossible for you to imagine the obstacles which must be overcome here. For instance, I was told recently by a lawyer that religion is alright for women, but men don't need it! This spirit of indifference towards religion is general among young men.

In the city of Otsu there are one hundred and seven Buddhist temples and sixty-five Shinto shrines. When I asked a Christian man what moral influence all these exerted, he replied: "None. On the contrary, the Buddhist temples exert the opposite influence because of the immoral lives of many of the priests." I have yet to hear of any movement among the Buddhists in Japan to help in the fight against liquor and the social evil although these evils are steadily increasing, and causing more and more poverty and misery. According to the Buddhist idea one san be saved without giving up his sins. When such teaching as this—salvation without repentance—has such a strong hold upon the mass of the people, you may imagine the difficulty of propagating Christianity. If any nation needs a Savior to save its people, not simply for the future but from present sins, surely Japan is such a nation.

Winning the Community

In the midst of such conditions as we find here in Shiga Province. one's aim must be greater than that of simply winning an individual here and another there for Christ. We must change, by the help of God and proper methods and goals, the whole spiritual and moral tone of the community. For twenty years we tried the old plan and it failed. Now we are speaking to work on a broader basis with the object of winning the community for Christ.

The First Year.

The first twelve months, Mr. Yabe and I spent largely in spying out our whole territory. We visited the Normal School, the Middle School (corresponding to a high school in America) and the provincial prison in Zeze, we went to see the Commercial School and the Girls' High and Normal School, in Otsu, and we visited the twenty-eight public schools in Kurita and Yasu counties, speaking at the request of the principals sometimes to as many as three or four hundred scholars

At that time a social survey was being made by the Federated Missions of rural conditions in all Japan. We helped in that work by interviewing the principals and from them learning the educational, social, economic, moral and religious conditions of the community. These interviews gave us the opportunity to explain our aims as Christian workers.

We found that in a majority of villages and towns the public school is becoming the center of the community. We made many friends among the teachers, principals and scholars.

A Community Building Needed.

Our visits to these schools deepened our conviction that we must have in Zeze just as early as possible a building adapted to our

needs. To carry on a Sunday school in a small Japanese residence—the best we could rent—we were led to realize would not appeal to a community where the public schools all have suitable buildings adapted to educational work.

Finding the Location.

First we tried to get the vacant lot in front of the Zeze Middle School. When finally the owner was willing, the principal objected. Then we sought to buy lots on the public square. In one case it was the priest of the most prominent Shinto shrine who stood in the way, while in the other in order to get enough ground we needed part of a lot belonging to one of the twenty-four Buddhist temples in Zeze. Of course we were refused.

The above negotiations took nearly a year. Then the owner of the lot upon which the town theatre stood, offered to sell it and the building also, provided he could persuade the other eight men with whom he owned the theatre jointly, to sell it for Christian purposes. He himself said: "Your Christianity is different from what I have seen in other places. You seem to be interested in the community."

Theatre Becomes Church.

On July 4, 1917, the theatre passed into our hands, just exactly two years after Mr. Yabe started to hold services in Zeze and one year after the church had been organized.

The first thing we did was to take down the "kamidana' or god-shelf just above the entrance on the inside. In addition to the little shrine enclosing a charm brought from a popular shrine called "Inarisan" there were on either side two little fox images and above an inscription, "O-Iri-Kanai," meaning, "Great crowds be granted."

We had expected to put up a new building, but the architect, after examining the old theatre, told us that with many additions and changes it could be made to serve our purpose well. The whole building was raised a foot and a half, glass windows were put in, new floors took the place of the old, rotted ones, bay windows were added both in the front and rear, the outside was finished with stucco, the inside newly plastered, three rooms were added, the gallery was extended, and so many other changes were made that one does not recognize in the new tabernacle the old Kotobukiza theatre.

Local Co-operation Secured.

The wonderful transformation from a dirty, dingy theatre to a bright, beautiful tabernacle was joyfully celebrated on Easter, March 31, 1918.

To the dedication exercises came many of the representative men of Zeze. Besides the mayor, such men as the principals of the two public schools, a number of the leading business men, the provincial prison governor, retired military officers, and some property-owners and officials were present. Their attendance at the dedication of a Christian church in a Japanese town like Zeze where there are twentyfour Buddhist temples and nineteen Shinto shrines meant the removal of much prejudice.

These men had each given something to help pay for the lot which had cost one thousand, five hundred and eighty-four yen. The members of the Zeze church did nobly and the other United Brethren churches, missionaries and friends kindly gave their co-operation.

The lot is 72 by 127 feet. Of its total over 1,170 yen has been paid

and the balance is being paid by the Zeze churches members from month to month. The splendid local co-operation in a community where Christianity is so new was due entirely to the preserving, tactful efforts of Mr. Yabe.

Activities in New Building.

Following the dedication a big Sunday school rally was held. Later the Doshisha Primrose Club gave a sacred concert. In August, the Boys' Summer School was held there. In the fall special evangelistic meetings were held. Recently the employees of the electric car line have met there for social gatherings with a spiritual message from Mr. Yabe.

At Christmas time the house was packed at the Snday school entertainment. Six hundred were present at a recent concert given by a local musical organization, and on February 11, which corresponds in Japan to our Fourth of July, the thirtieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution was celebrated with a large attendance.

These occasions make it possible for us to come into helpful relation to a large part of the local community, Now we need not be ashamed to invite anyone to the church.

All Phases of Work Helped.

The attendance at the evening church services has grown. The Sunday school work is more effective. The young men's room with its ping-pong tables has been in constant use. The swings, sand pile, and sliding board in the play-ground have brought joy to many hearts. Night classes in mathematics, and Chinese classics, and afternoon classes in English conversation have been appreciated by the young men,

If only you all could visit us some Snday morning and see our classes as they go to their class-rooms for their study, and then could see where we formerly met, you would understand better how grateful we are to God for our new building! Formerly after the opening exercises four of our eight classes had to go to a small house a half square away, even in rainy weather, and my Bible class of young men went to the dressing-room of a neighboring public bath-house!

A Transformed Life.

Well, some one is saying, "What have been the spiritual results at Zeze?" Too many to mention in detail. Let me give just a few. One of the members of the committee for securing funds for the lot was once a heavy drinker and gambler. He was disinherited and came to Zeze and got work at the railroad shop. About two years ago he was invited by one of our members to some special evangelistic meetings. He was thoroughly converted. Now he is an active personal worker. Not long ago he was burned severely in a boiler explosion. At the Red Cross Hospital in Otsu his patience, notwithstanding his terrible suffering, was quite a contrast to that of a fellow workman burnt at the same time. His complete trust in God and his peace as he faced the future won the admiration of all those in his ward. His father recognized the wonderful change in his life and has received him back into his family.

A Self-Sacrificing Mother.

One of the first fruits of the Zene kindergarten, so far as the church is concerned, was the conversion of one of the mothers. She is now

one of our most earnest workers. Her mother-in-law who lives with her is not sympathetic to Christianity. When subscriptions were taken for the lot, she pledged one yen (fifty cents) a month. Although she has three children and must do all her own work and look after a small store, she earned this extra money by making *"haori no himo"* (or braid for coats) at night.

Just now she is doing her best to lead her husband to Christ. He is the principal of a country public school with over six hundred scholars. Like many other Japanese educators, he is not sure Christianity is not contrary to the Japanese national spirit. I recently loaned him a two-volume "History of Christianity in Japan." His conversion would mean much. Continue to pray for him, and his wife.

Winning Young People.

Of Zeze Church's thirty-eight members, twenty-four are young people. What it that saying about "Win a young person and you win a multiplication table?" At any rate that is our conviction. Of these young people six of them came into the church through the Sunday school and seven through Bible class work. I wish you might meet the oldest of them. He is now studying in the ecoomic department of the Doshisha University. He is one of our most faithful and earnest Sunday school teachers, assistant treasurer of the church and Mr. Yabe's right hand man. I have often longed to see him decide for the ministry, but whether he becomes a minister or layman, if in the providence of God he is permitted to live he will make his life tell mightily for the coming of the Kingdom in this part of the world.

Moulding Child Life.

Since the opening of the Zeze kindergarten in April, 1916, eighty-five boys and girls have been enrolled. In 1917, there were eleven graduates, in 1918, twenty, and this year there will be fifteen, making forty-six in all. What deep religious impressions they have received only eternity will reveal. When they began to come to the kindergarten, they were in the habit of making little Buddhist temples with the clay during free periods. Now they mould churches and build churches with the blocks.

Establishing a New Center.

Just thirty minutes on the interurban line from our home in Kyoto is Otsu, the capital of Shiga Province, situated on the southern shore of beautiful Lake Biwa. Here are located all the provincial offices.

Last April we started a kindergarten with an enrollment of six which has increased to sixteen, and this March there will be seven graduates. An English Night School for young men has enrolled over fifty.

Mrs. Knipp has an English Bible class for the high school girls and also a meeting for the teachers of English, while I meet with a group of men once a week to discuss Current Events in English. This brings me in touch regularly with the heads of two departments in the provincial building, a banker, a teacher, and the governor of the Zeze provincial prison.

One Phase of the Need.

For fifteen years we tried to get a hold in this city of Otsu by the ordinary methods of conducting a Sunday school and holding

preaching services. We di dreach a few individuals, but it has been impossible to build up a church.

If you should happen to be in Otsu on one of the heathen festival days and see the great crowds under its influence, you would realize somewhat why work there is not easy. Like Athens when Paul visited it, Otsu "is full of idols." In that city there are over one hundred Buddhist temples and sixty-five Shinto shrines.

To show the people what Christianity really is we believe God wants our Church to establish a Christian center there that will do for that community the kind of work which will help capture the city for Christ. *We need a building suitable for such work.* At present the little congregation and the Sunday school and kindergarten and night school, all do their work in a Japanese dwelling.

Another Advance Step.

On the first Sunday of this year we started our newspaper evangelistic campaign. Once a week in each of the two Otsu dailies Mr. Yabe inserts a column, giving a helpful Christian message. The cost is only one hundred and twenty-five dollars a year. Next year we hope to have enough in our appropriation to use at least two columns.

Reaching Our Rural Field.

This newspaper work is having its influence also on the country people where the prejudice is very strong against Christianity. In one of our two counties, with a population of 43,000 people, there are 242 Buddhist temples with 255 priests and not a single resident Christian worker!

In the adjoining county with 49,816 people we have one evangelist and a small group of Christians, but what are they among so many? "It's a long way to Tipperary" and it is a long way to the Christianizing of these rural communities, but we believe God wants these people to know of His love as revealed in Christ. *To our Church He has given the privilege of being His representatives to these people. If we are not faithful, they will not hear because this territory has been assigned to us and the other missions have responsibility elsewhere.*

A Little Child Shall Lead Them.

In each of these two counties in the county seat we must do a typical Christian work. In addition to the Sunday school and church we ought to have a kindergarten and other helpful activities. In Kusatsu, one county-seat, we have been forced to move five times in less than four years. So urgent is the need for a permanent, suitable building that we recently started a building fund in the Sunday school. When one little girl, who has been faithfully coming to our Sunday school for several years, told her mother about the new plan she said, "Oh, you will be an old woman before those Christians do anything like that," and laughed.

Meeting the Challenge.

At Zeze we have made, under the blessing of God, a good beginning. At Otsu we are getting a new start. In the country we have hardly begun. The people, including multitudes and multitudes of children and women, are like sheep without a shepherd. The harvest is plenteous but the laborers, indeed, are few. Will you not join with us in daily prayer to the Lord of the harvest that he send forth laborers into the harvest?